The Parable of the ten Virgins.

Tillotson (John)

IN A

SERMON

Preached before

Her Royal Highneſs the

Princeſs ANN of Denmark

AT

TUNBRIDGE-WELLS

September *the* 2d. 1688.

By JOHN Lord Archbiſhop of CANTERBURY.

LONDON:

Printed for B. Aylmer at the *Three Pigeons* againſt the *Royal Exchange* in *Cornhill*: And W. Rogers at the *Sun* againſt St. *Dunſtan's* Church in *Fleetſtreet*. MDCXCIV.

4475.b.97

3.

Jno. Tillotson, A Bp. of Canterbury. Rr. of Ketton. Suff

THE

Archbiſhop of *CANTERBURY's*

SERMON

Preached before the

Princeſs ANN of Denmark

At *Tunbridge-Wells*, *September* the 2d. 1688.

BRITISH MUSEUM

The Parable of the ten Virgins.

MATTH. XXV. 1, 2. &c.

Then ſhall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten Virgins, which took their Lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom.

And five of them were wiſe, and five were fooliſh, &c.

MY deſign at preſent is to explain this *Parable*, and to make ſuch *Obſervations* upon it as ſeem moſt naturally and without ſqueezing the *Parable* to ſpring from it: And then to make ſome *Application* of it to our ſelves.

Then ſhall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten Virgins; By the *Kingdom of Heaven* is meant the ſtate and condition of things under the *Goſpel*; By the *ten Virgins*, thoſe who embraced the Profeſſion of it, which is here repreſented by their *taking their Lamps and going forth to meet the Bridegroom*: in alluſion to the ancient Cuſtom of *Marriages*, in which the *Bridegroom* was wont to lead home his *Bride* in the Night by the light of *Lamps* or *Torches*.

But this Profeſſion was not in all equally firm and fruitful; and therefore thoſe who perſever'd and continued ſtedfaſt in this Profeſſion, notwithſtanding all the temptations and allurements of the World, and all the fierce ſtorms and aſſaults of perſecution to which this Profeſſion was expoſed; and being thus firmly rooted in it, did bring forth the fruits of the Spirit and abound in the Graces and Virtues of a good life, Theſe are the *wiſe Virgins*: But thoſe who either deſerted this Profeſſion, or did not bring forth fruits anſwerable to it, are the *fooliſh Virgins*.

And that this is the true difference between them will appear, if we conſider how the *Parable* repreſents them, *verſ.* 3, 4. *They that were fooliſh took their Lamps, and took no Oyl with them: But the wiſe took Oyl in their Veſſels with their Lamps.* So that they both took their *Lamps*, and both lighted them, and therefore muſt both be ſuppos'd to have ſome *oyl* in their *Lamps* at firſt, as appears from *verſe* 8. where *the fooliſh Virgins ſaid unto the wiſe, give us of your oyl, for our Lamps are gone out.* They had it ſeems ſome Oyl in their Lamps at firſt, which kept them lighted for a little while, but had taken no care for a future ſupply. And therefore the difference between the *wiſe* and *fooliſh* Virgins did not, as ſome have imagin'd, conſiſt in this, that the *wiſe* Virgins had Oyl, but the *fooliſh* had none; but in this, that the *fooliſh* had taken no care for a further ſupply, after the Oyl which was at firſt put into their Lamps was ſpent; as the *wiſe* had done, who beſides the Oyl that was in their Lamps carried likewiſe a *Reſerve* in ſome other *Veſſel*, for a continual ſupply of the *Lamp*, as there ſhould be occaſion; *the wiſe took Oyl in their Veſſels with their Lamps.*

Now

Now the meaning of all this is, That they who are repreſented by the *wiſe Virgins* had not only embraced the Profeſſion of the *Chriſtian* Religion, as the *fooliſh Virgins* alſo had done, for they both had their Lamps lighted; but they likewiſe perſever'd in that Profeſſion, and brought forth fruits anſwerable to it. For by *Oyl* in their *Lamps* and the firſt lighting of them, which was common to them both, is meant that ſolemn Profeſſion of *Faith* and *Repentance* which all *Chriſtians* make in *Baptiſm*: By that farther *ſupply of Oyl*, which the *wiſe Virgins* only took care to provide, is ſignified our conſtancy and perſeverance in this Profeſſion, together with the fruits of the Spirit, and the improvement of the *Grace* received in *Baptiſm* by the practice and exerciſe of all the *Graces* and *Virtues* of a good life whereby men are fitted and prepar'd for *Death* and *Judgment*, which are here repreſented to us by the *coming of the Bridegroom.*

This being plainly the main ſcope and intention of the *Parable*, I ſhall explain the reſt of it, as there ſhall be occaſion, under the ſeveral *Obſervations* which I ſhall raiſe from the ſeveral parts of it. And they ſhall be theſe.

Firſt, I obſerve the charitable *Decorum* which our *B. Saviour* keeps in this as well as in the reſt of his *Parables*; as if He would fain ſuppoſe and hope, that among thoſe who enjoy the *Goſpel* and make profeſſion of it, the number of them that are truly good is equal to thoſe that are bad. For our *B. Saviour* here repreſents the whole number of the *Profeſſors* of *Chriſtianity* by *ten Virgins*, the half whereof the *Parable* ſeems to ſuppoſe to be truly and really good, and to perſevere in goodneſs to the end, *verſ.* 1, 2. *Then ſhall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten Virgins, which*

took their Lamps and went forth to meet the Bridegroom: And five of them were wiſe, and five were fooliſh.

Secondly, I obſerve how very common it is for men to neglect this great concernment of their Souls, *viz.* a due preparation for another World; and how willing men are to deceive themſelves herein, and to depend upon any thing elſe, how groundleſs and unreaſonable ſoever, rather than to take pains to be really good and fit for Heaven. And this is in a very lively manner repreſented to us in the deſcription of the *fooliſh Virgins*, who had provided no *ſupply* of *Oyl* in their *Veſſels*, and when the *Bridegroom* was coming would have furniſh'd themſelves by *borrowing* or *buying* of others, *verſ.* 8, 9, 10.

Thirdly, I obſerve, That even the better ſort of Chriſtians are not careful and watchful as they ought to prepare themſelves for Death and Judgment: *Whilſt the Bridegroom tarried, they all ſlumbered and ſlept*; even the *wiſe* Virgins as well as the fooliſh.

Fourthly, I obſerve further, how little is to be done by us, to any good purpoſe, in this great work of *Preparation*, when it is deferr'd and put off to the laſt. Thus the *fooliſh Virgins* did, and what a ſad confuſion and hurry they were in we may ſee *verſ.* 6, 7, 8, 9. *And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold! the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him. At midnight*; the moſt diſmal and unſeaſonable time of all other: *Then all thoſe Virgins aroſe, and trimmed their Lamps: and the fooliſh ſaid unto the wiſe, give us of your Oyl for our Lamps are gone out: But the wiſe anſwered, not ſo; leſt there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that ſell, and buy for your ſelves.* And how ineffectual all that they could do at that time prov'd to be, we find, *verſe* 10, 11, 12; *And whilſt they went to buy*

the

the Bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was ſhut. Afterwards came alſo the other Virgins, ſaying, Lord, Lord, open to us: But he anſwered and ſaid, verily I ſay unto you, I know you not.

Fifthly, I obſerve that there is no ſuch thing as *Works* of *Super-erogation*; That no man can do more than needs, and is his duty to do, by way of preparation for another World. For when the *fooliſh Virgins* would have begg'd of the *wiſe* ſome *Oyl for their Lamps, the wiſe anſwered, not ſo; leſt there be not enough for us and you.* It was only the *fooliſh Virgins* that had entertain'd this fooliſh conceit, that there might be an *over-plus* of *Grace* and *Merit* in others ſufficient to ſupply their want: But the *wiſe* knew not of any they had to ſpare, but ſuppos'd all that they had little enough to qualify them for the reward of eternal life; *Not ſo*, ſay they, μήποτε, *leſt at any time*, leſt when there ſhould be need and occaſion, all that we have done, or could do, ſhould prove little enough for our ſelves.

Sixthly and *laſtly*, I obſerve, That if we could ſuppoſe any perſons to be ſo over-good, as to have more grace and goodneſs than needs to qualify them for the reward of eternal life, yet there is no *aſſigning* and *transferring* of this *over-plus* of *Grace* and *Virtue* from one man to another. For we ſee, *verſe* 9, 10. that all the ways which they could think of, of *borrowing*, or *buying Oyl* of others, did all prove ineffectual; becauſe the thing is in its own nature impracticable, that one Sinner ſhould be in a condition to merit for another.

All theſe *Obſervations* ſeem to have ſome fair and probable foundation in ſome part or other of this *Parable*;

rable; and moſt of them, I am ſure, are agreeable to the main ſcope and intention of the whole. I ſhall ſpeak to them ſeverally, and as briefly as I can.

I. *Firſt*, I obſerve the charitable *Decorum* which our *B. Saviour* keeps in this, as well as in the reſt of his *Parables*; as if he would fain ſuppoſe and hope, that among thoſe who enjoy the *Goſpel* and make *Profeſſion* of it, the number of thoſe who make a firm and ſincere Profeſſion of it, and perſevere in goodneſs to the end, is equal to the number of thoſe who do not make good their Profeſſion, or who fall off from it.

I ſhall not be long upon this, becauſe I lay the leaſt ſtreſs upon it, of all the reſt. I ſhall only take notice, that our *B. Saviour* in this *Parable* repreſents the whole number of the *Profeſſors* of *Chriſtianity* by *ten Virgins*, the half of which the *Parable* ſeems to ſuppoſe to have ſincerely embraced the *Chriſtian Profeſſion*, and to have perſever'd therein to the laſt; *The Kingdom of heaven ſhall be likened unto ten Virgin, which took their Lamps and went forth to meet the Bridegroom: And five of them were wiſe, and five were fooliſh.*

And this *Decorum* our *B. Saviour* ſeems carefully to obſerve in his other *Parables:* As in the *Parable* of the *Prodigal*, *Luke* 15. where for *one* Son that left his Father, and took riotous courſes, there was *another* that ſtayed always with him and continued conſtant to his duty. And in the *Parable* of the *ten Talents*, which immediately follows that of the *ten Virgins*, *two* are ſuppoſed to improve the Talents committed to them, for *one* that made no improvement of his. He that had *five Talents* committed to him made them *five more*, and he that had *two* gained *other two*; and only he that had but *one Talent*, *hid it in the earth*, and

and made no improvement of it. And in the *Parable* which I am now upon, the number of the *Professors* of *Christianity*, who took care to fit and prepare themselves for the *coming of the Bridegroom*, is supposed equal to the number of those who did not.

And whether this be particularly intended in the *Parable* or not, it may however be thus far instructive to us; That we should be so far from lessening the number of *true Christians*, and from confining the *Church* of *Christ* within a narrow compass, so as to exclude out of its *Communion* the far greatest part of the *Professors* of *Christianity*; that on the contrary, we should enlarge the *Kingdom* of *Christ* as much as we can, and extend our charity to all *Churches* and *Christians*, of what *Denomination* soever, as far as regard to Truth and to the foundations of the *Christian* Religion will permit us to believe and hope well of them; and rather be contented to err a little on the favourable and charitable part than to be mistaken on the censorious and damning side.

And for this reason perhaps it is, that our *B. Saviour* thought fit to frame his *Parables* with so remarkable a *Byas* to the charitable side: Partly to instruct us, to extend our charity towards all *Christian* Churches, and *Professors* of the *Christian* Religion, and our good hopes concerning them, as far as with reason we can: And partly to reprove the uncharitableness of the *Jews*, who positively excluded all the rest of Mankind, besides themselves, from all hopes of Salvation. An odious temper, which to the infinite Scandal of the *Christian* Name and Profession, hath prevail'd upon some *Christians* to that notorious degree, as not only to shut out all the *Reform'd* Part of the *Western* Church, almost equal in number to themselves, from all hopes of Salvation

vation under the notion of *Hereticks*; but likewise to un-church all the other Churches of the *Christian* World, which are of much greater extent and number than themselves, that do not own subjection to the *Bishop* of *Rome*: And this they do, by declaring it to be *of necessity to Salvation for every Creature to be subject to the Roman Bishop.* And this *Supremacy* of the *Bishop* of *Rome* over all *Christian* Churches *Bellarmin* calls *the Sum of the Christian Religion.* So that the *Roman* Communion is plainly founded in *Schism*, that is, in the most unchristian and uncharitable *Principle* that can be, namely, *that they are the only true Church of Christ, out of which none can be saved*: which was the very *Schism* of the *Donatists.* And in this they are so positive, that the Learned men of that Church, in their Disputes and Writings, are much more inclinable to believe the Salvation of *Heathens* to be possible; than of any of those *Christians* whom they are pleas'd to call *Hereticks.* The *Faith* of the Church of *Rome* is certainly none of the best; but of one of the greatest and most essential Vertues of the *Christian Religion*, I mean *Charity*, I doubt they have the least share of any *Christian* Church this day in the World.

II. *Secondly*, I observe, not from any particular *circumstance*, but from the main *Scope* and design of this *Parable*, How very apt a great part of *Christians* are to neglect this great concernment of their Souls, *viz.* a careful and due preparation for another World; and how willing they are to deceive themselves in this matter, and to depend upon any thing else, how groundless and unreasonable soever, rather than to take the pains to be really good and fit for Heaven. And this is in a very lively manner represented to us in the description

ſcription of the *fooliſh Virgins*, who had provided no *ſupply* of *Oyl* in their *Veſſels*, and when the *Bridegroom* was *coming* would have furniſh'd themſelves by *borrowing* or *buying* of others, *verſ.* 8, 9, 10. They contented themſelves with having their *Lamps* lighted at their firſt ſetting out to meet the *Bridegroom*, that is, with their being admitted into the *Profeſſion* of *Chriſtianity* by *Baptiſm*, but either were not ſtedfaſt in this *Profeſſion*, or were not careful to adorn it with the *Graces* and *Vertues* of a good life.

And the true Reaſon why men are ſo very apt to deceive themſelves in this matter, and are ſo hardly brought to thoſe things wherein Religion mainly conſiſts, I mean the fruits of the Spirit and the practice of real Goodneſs; I ſay, the true reaſon of this is, becauſe they are extremely deſirous to reconcile, if it were poſſible, the hopes of eternal happineſs in another World with a liberty to live as they liſt in this preſent World: They are loth to be at the trouble and drudgery of mortifying their luſts, and governing their paſſions, and bridling their tongues, and practiſing all thoſe duties which are comprehended in thoſe *two great Commandments* of the *Love of God* and of our *Neighbour*: They would fain gain the favour of God, and make their calling and election ſure, by ſome eaſier way than by *giving all diligence* to add to their *Faith* and *Knowledge* the *Graces* and *Vertues* of a good life.

For the plain truth of the matter is, men had rather that Religion ſhould be any thing than what indeed it is, *viz.* the thwarting and croſſing of their vicious inclinations, the curing of their evil and corrupt affections, the due care and government of their unruly appetites and paſſions, the ſincere endeavour and

the conſtant practice of all holineſs and virtue in their lives: And therefore they had much rather have ſomething that might handſomely palliate and excuſe their evil inclinations and practices, than to be obliged to retrench and renounce them; and rather than amend and reform their wicked lives, they would be contented to make an *honourable amends* and compenſation to Almighty God in ſome other way.

This hath been the way and folly of Mankind in all ages, to defeat the great end and deſign of Religion, and to thruſt it by, by ſubſtituting ſomething elſe in the place of it which, as they think, may ſerve the turn as well, having the appearance of as much devotion and reſpect towards God, and really coſting them more money and pains, than that which God requires of them. Men have ever been apt thus to impoſe upon themſelves, and to pleaſe themſelves with a conceit of pleaſing God full as well, or better, by ſome other way than that which he hath preſcribed and appointed for them.

By this means, and upon this *falſe Principle*, Religion hath ever been apt to degenerate both among *Jews* and *Chriſtians*, into external and little obſervances, and into a great zeal for leſſer things with a total neglect of the greater and weightier matters of Religion; and, in a word, into infinite *Superſtitions* of one kind or other, and an arrogant conceit of the extraordinary righteouſneſs and merit of theſe things: In which ſome have proceeded to that height, as if they could drive a ſtrict bargain with God for eternal life and happineſs; and have treated Him in ſo inſolent a manner, by their Doctrine of the *Merit* of their *Devotions* and *good Works*, as if God were as much beholden to them for their ſervice and obedience,

dience, as they are to Him for the reward of them; which they are not afraid to ſay they may challenge at God's hands as of right and juſtice belonging to them.

Nay, ſo far have they carried this *Doctrine* in the Church of *Rome*, as not only to pretend to merit eternal life for themſelves, but likewiſe to do a great deal more for the benefit and advantage of others who have not righteouſneſs and goodneſs enough of their own: Which was the ſilly conceit of the *fooliſh Virgins* here in the *Parable*, as I ſhall have occaſion to ſhew more fully by and by.

And it is no great wonder that ſuch eaſy ways of Religion and pleaſing God are very grateful to the corrupt nature of Man, and that men who are reſolv'd to continue in an evil courſe are glad to be of a Church which will aſſure Salvation to men upon ſuch terms: The great difficulty is, for men to believe that things which are ſo apparently abſurd and unreaſonable can be true; and to perſuade themſelves that they can impoſe upon God by ſuch pretences of ſervice and obedience, as no wiſe *Prince* or *Father* upon earth is to be deluded withal by his *Subjects* or *Children*. We ought to have worthier thoughts of God, and to conſider that He is a *great King*, and will be obey'd and obſerv'd by his creatures *in his own way* and make them happy upon his own terms: and that obedience to what he commands is better and more acceptable to him than any other ſacrifice that we can offer, which he hath not required at our hands: and likewiſe, that he is infinitely wiſe and good; and therefore that the *Laws*, which he hath given us to live by, are much more likely and certain means of our happineſs, than any *inventions* and *devices* of our own.

III. *Thirdly*, I obſerve that even the better and more conſiderate ſort of *Chriſtians* are not ſo careful and watchful as they ought to prepare themſelves for *Death* and *Judgment*; *whilſt the Bridegroom tarried, they all ſlumbered and ſlept.* Even the *Diſciples* of our *Saviour*, whilſt he was yet perſonally preſent with them, and after a particular charge given them from his own mouth, *Watch and pray leſt ye enter into temptation*; yet did not keep that guard upon themſelves as to *watch with him for one hour. In many things*, ſays *St. James*, *we offend all*; even the beſt of us: And who is there that doth not, ſome time or other, remit of his vigilancy and care, ſo as to give the Devil an advantage and to lye open to temptation, for want of a continual guard upon himſelf? But then the difference between the *wiſe* and *fooliſh Virgins* was this, that tho they both *ſlept*, yet the *wiſe* did not let their *Lamps* go out; they neither quitted their *Profeſſion*, nor did they extinguiſh it by a bad life: and tho when the *Bridegroom* came ſuddenly upon them, they were not ſo actually prepar'd to meet him by a continual vigilancy, yet they were habitually prepar'd by the good diſpoſition of their minds and the general courſe of a holy life: Their *Lamps* might *burn dim* for want of continual trimming, but they had *Oyl* in their *Veſſels* to *ſupply* their *Lamps*, which the *fooliſh Virgins* had taken no care to provide. But ſurely the greateſt wiſdom of all is to maintain a continual watchfulneſs, that ſo we may not be ſurpriz'd by the *coming of the Bridegroom*, and be in a confuſion when *Death* or *Judgment* ſhall overtake us. And *bleſſed are thoſe Servants*, and *wiſe* indeed, whoſe *Lamps* always *burn bright*, and whom the *Bridegroom* when *he comes ſhall find watching* and in a fit poſture and preparation to meet Him.

Fourthly,

Fourthly, I obſerve likewiſe, how little is to be done by us, to any good purpoſe, in this great work of *Preparation*, when it is deferr'd and put off to the laſt. And thus the *fooliſh Virgins* did, but what a ſad confuſion and hurry they were in at the ſudden coming of the *Bridegroom*, when they were not only *aſleep*, but when after they were awaken'd they found themſelves altogether unprovided of that which was neceſſary to trim their *Lamps* and to put them in a poſture to meet the *Bridegroom*: When they wanted that which was neceſſary at that very inſtant, but could not be provided in an inſtant: I ſay, what a tumult and confuſion they were in, being thus ſurpriz'd, the *Parable* repreſents to us at large, *verſ.* 6, 7, 8, 9. *and at midnight there was a cry made, Behold! the Bridegroom* cometh, *go ye out to meet him. Then all thoſe Virgins aroſe and trimmed their Lamps*, that is, they went about it as well as they could; and the *fooliſh ſaid unto the wiſe, give us of your Oyl, for our Lamps are gone out.* IV.

At midnight there was a cry made, that is, at the moſt diſmal and unſeaſonable time of all other; when they were faſt aſleep, and ſuddenly awaken'd in great terror, when they could not on the ſudden recollect themſelves, and conſider what to do; when the ſummons was ſo very ſhort, that they had neither time to conſider what was fit to be done, nor time to do it in.

And ſuch is the Caſe of thoſe who put off their *Repentance* and *Preparation* for another World, till they are ſurpriz'd by *Death* or *Judgment*; for it comes all to one in the iſſue, which of them it be. The *Parable* indeed ſeems more particularly to point at our *Lord's coming to Judgment*, but the caſe is much the ſame as to thoſe who are ſurpriz'd by *ſudden Death*; ſuch as gives them but little, or not ſufficient time for ſo great

great a work: becauſe ſuch as *Death* leaves them, *Judgment* will certainly find them.

And what a miſerable confuſion muſt they needs be in, who are thus ſurpriz'd either by the one or the other? How unfit ſhould we be, if the *general Judgment* of the World ſhould come upon us on the ſudden, to meet that *great Judge* at his *coming*, if we have made no preparation for it before that time? What ſhall we then be able to do, in that great and univerſal conſternation, when the *Son of man ſhall appear in the clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory*; when the *Sun ſhall be darken'd, and the Moon turned into blood, and all the powers of Heaven ſhall be ſhaken*: when *all Nature* ſhall feel ſuch violent pangs and convulſions, and the whole World ſhall be in a combuſtion flaming and cracking about our ears: When *the Heavens ſhall be ſhrivel'd up as a Scroll when it is roll'd together*, and the *Earth* ſhall be toſs'd from its Center, *and every Mountain and Iſland ſhall be removed?* What thoughts can the wiſeſt men then have about them, in the midſt of ſo much noiſe and terror? Or if they could have any, what time will there then be to put them in execution?. when they ſhall ſee the *Angel, that ſtandeth upon the Sea and upon the Earth, lifting up his hand to Heaven and ſwearing by Him that liveth for ever and ever that Time ſhall be no longer*; as this dreadful Day is deſcribed *Rev.* 10. 5,6. and *chap.* 6. 15. where Sinners are repreſented at the *Appearance* of this *Great Judge*, not as flying to God in hopes of mercy, but as flying from Him in utter deſpair of finding mercy with Him: *The Kings of the Earth, and the Great Men, and the Mighty Men, and the Rich Men, and the Great Captains hid themſelves in the Dens and in the Rocks of the Earth; and ſaid to the Mountains and Rocks*

fall

fall on us and hide us from the face of Him that ſitteth on the Throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the Great Day of his wrath is come, and who ſhall be able to ſtand? The biggeſt and the boldeſt Sinners that ever were upon Earth, ſhall then flee from the face of Him whom they have ſo often blaſphemed and denied; and ſhall ſo far deſpair of finding mercy with Him in that Day, who would ſue to Him for it no ſooner, that they ſhall addreſs themſelves to the *Mountains* and *Rocks*, as being more pitiful and exorable than *He*; *to hide them from the face of Him that ſitteth on the Throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: From the wrath of the Lamb*, to ſignify to us that nothing is more terrible than *Meekneſs* and *Patience* when they are throughly provok'd and turn'd into *Fury*.

In ſuch dreadful confuſion ſhall all impenitent Sinners be, when they ſhall be ſurpriz'd by that *Great and terrible Day of the Lord:* And the *Caſe* of a *dying Sinner*, who would take no care in the time of his Life and Health to make preparation for another World, is not much more hopeful and comfortable.

For alas! how little is it that a ſick and dying man can do in ſuch a ſtrait of time? in the midſt of ſo much pain and weakneſs of Body, and of ſuch confuſion and amazement of Mind. With what heart can he ſet about ſo great a Work, for which there is ſo little time? With what face can he apply himſelf to God in this extremity, whom he hath ſo diſdainfully neglected all the days of his Life? And how can he have the confidence to hope, that God will hear his cries and regard his tears that are forc'd from him in this day of his neceſſity? when he is conſcious to himſelf that in that *long day* of God's *Grace* and *Patience* he turned a deaf ear to all his merciful invitations, and *rejected*

the

the counsel of God against himself. In a word how can he who *would not know, in that his Day, the things which belonged to his peace*, expect any other but that they should now be for ever *hid from his eyes*, which are ready to be clos'd in utter darkness?

I will not pronounce any thing concerning the impossibility of a *death-bed Repentance:* But I am sure that it is very difficult, and I believe very rare. We have but one *Example*, that I know of, in the whole *Bible* of the Repentance of a dying Sinner; I mean that of the *penitent Thief* upon the *Cross:* And the circumstances of his Case are so peculiar and extraordinary, that I cannot see that it affords any ground of hope and encouragement to men in ordinary Casts. We are not like to suffer in the company of the *Son of God* and of the *Saviour of the World*; and if we could do so, it is not certain that we should behave our selves towards Him so well as the *penitent Thief* did, and make so very good an end of so very bad a Life.

And the *Parable* in the *Text* is so far from giving any encouragement to a *Death-bed Repentance* and *Preparation*, that it rather represents their Case as desperate who put off their *Preparation* to that Time. How ineffectual all that the *foolish Virgins* could do at that time did in the conclusion prove, is set forth to us at large in the *Parable*; They wanted *Oyl*, but could neither *borrow* nor *buy* it: They would *then* fain have had it, and ran about to get it; but it was not to be obtain'd neither by entreaty, nor for money: First they apply themselves to the *wise Virgins*, for a share in the *over-plus* of their *Graces* and *Virtues*; *the foolish said unto the wise, give us of your Oyl for our Lamps are gone out; but the wise answered, not so; lest there be not enough for us and you:* The *wise Virgins*, it seems knew

V. 8,9,10, 11, 12.

V. 8.

knew of none they had to ſpare: And then they are repreſented as *ironically* ſending the *fooliſh Virgins* to ſome *famous Market* where this *Oyl* was pretended to be *ſold*; *go ye rather to them that ſell and buy for your ſelves*: And as dying and deſperate perſons are apt to catch at every twig, and when they can ſee no hopes of being ſaved, are apt to believe every one that will give them any; ſo theſe fooliſh Virgins follow the advice; *and whilſt they went to buy, the Bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was ſhut; and afterwards came alſo the other Virgins, ſaying, Lord, Lord, open to us; but he anſwered and ſaid, verily I ſay unto you, I know you not.* V 9. V. 10.

You ſee how *little*, or rather *no* encouragement at all there is from any the leaſt circumſtance in this *Parable*, for thoſe who have delay'd their *Preparation* for another World till they be overtaken by *Death* or *Judgment*, to hope by any thing that they can then do, by any importunity which they can then uſe, to gain admiſſion into Heaven. Let thoſe conſider this with fear and trembling, who forget God and neglect Religion all their Life-time, and yet feed themſelves with vain hopes by ſome *Device* or other to be admitted into Heaven at laſt.

Fifthly, I obſerve that there is no ſuch thing as *Works of Super-erogation*, that is, that no man can do more than needs, and than is his duty to do, by way of *Preparation* for another World. For when the *fooliſh Virgins* would have begg'd of the *wiſe* ſome *Oyl* for their *Lamps*, *the wiſe anſwered*, *not ſo*; *leſt there be not enough for us and you*: It was only the *fooliſh Virgins* that in the time of their extremity, and V. V. 8. V 9.

when they were conſcious that they wanted that which was abſolutely neceſſary to qualify them for admiſſion into Heaven, who had entertain'd this *idle Conceit* that there might be an *overplus* of *Grace* and *Merit* in others ſufficient to ſupply their want: But the *wiſe* knew not of any they had to ſpare, but ſuppoſed all that they had done, or could poſſibly do, to be little enough to qualify them for the glorious Reward of eternal Life: *Not ſo*, ſay they, μήποτε *leſt at any time*, that is, leſt when there ſhould be need and occaſion, all that we have done, or could do, ſhould be little enough for our ſelves: And in this *Point* they had been plainly inſtructed by the *Bridegroom* himſelf, *But ye, when ye have done all, ſay we are unprofitable ſervants, and have done nothing but what was our duty to do.*

And yet this *Conceit* of the *fooliſh Virgins*, as abſurd as it is, hath been taken up in good earneſt by a *grave Matron*, who gives out her ſelf to be the *Mother and Miſtreſs of all Churches*, and *the only infallible Oracle of Truth*, I mean the *Church* of *Rome*, whoſe avowed *Doctrine* it is, that there are ſome Perſons ſo excellently good that they may do more than needs for their own Salvation: And therefore when they have done as much for themſelves as in ſtrict duty they are bound to do, and thereby have paid down a full and valuable conſideration for Heaven, and as much as in equal juſtice between God and Man it is worth; that then they may go to work again for their *Friends*, and begin a *new Score*; and from that time forwards may put the *Surpluſage* of their *good Works* as a *Debt* upon God, to be laid up in the *Publick Treaſury* of the *Church*, as ſo many *Bills of Credit* which the *Pope* by his *Pardons* and *Indulgences* may

may diſpenſe, and place to whoſe account he pleaſes: And out of this *Bank*, which is kept at *Rome*, thoſe who never took care to have any Righteouſneſs of their own may be ſupplied at reaſonable rates.

To which they have added a further *ſupply* of *Grace*, if there ſhould be any need of it, by the *Sacrament* of *extreme Unction*, never heard of in the *Chriſtian Church* for many Ages; but deviſed, as it were on purpoſe, to furniſh ſuch *fooliſh Virgins* with *Oyl* as are here deſcribed in the *Parable*.

And thus by one *Device* or other they have enervated the *Chriſtian Religion* to that degree, that it hath almoſt quite loſt its true virtue and efficacy upon the hearts and lives of men: And, inſtead of the real fruits of *Goodneſs* and *Righteouſneſs*, it produceth little elſe but *Superſtition* and *Folly*; or if it produce any *real Virtues*, yet even the virtue of thoſe *Virtues* is in a great meaſure ſpoil'd by their arrogant pretences of *Merit* and *Super-erogation*, and is render'd inſignificant to themſelves by their inſolent carriage and behaviour towards God.

Sixthly and *laſtly*, if we could ſuppoſe any Perſons to be ſo overgrown with Goodneſs, as to have more than needs to qualify them for the Reward of eternal Life; yet there can be no *aſſigning* and *transferring* of this *overplus* of *Grace* and *Virtue* from one man to another. For we ſee that all the ways that could be thought on of *begging*, or *borrowing*, or *buying Oyl* of others, did all prove ineffectual; becauſe the thing is in its own nature impracticable, that one Sinner who owes all that he hath, and much more to God, ſhould have any thing to ſpare wherewithal to *merit* for another.

Indeed our *B. Saviour* hath *merited* for us all the *Reward of eternal Life*, upon the *Conditions* of *Faith* and *Repentance* and *Obedience*: But the infinite *Merit* of his *Obedience* and *Sufferings* will be of no benefit and advantage to us, if we our ſelves be not really and inherently righteous. So *St. John* tells us, and warns us to beware of the contrary *Conceit*, *Little children, let no man deceive you, he that doth righteouſneſs is righteous, even as He is righteous.*

If we do ſincerely endeavour to pleaſe God and to keep his commandments in the general courſe of a holy and virtuous Life, the *Merit* of *Chriſt's perfect Obedience* and *Sufferings* will be available with God for the acceptance of our *ſincere* though but *imperfect Obedience.* But if we take no care to be *righteous* and good our ſelves, the *perfect righteouſneſs* of *Chriſt* will do us no good; much leſs the *imperfect righteouſneſs* of any other man who is a Sinner himſelf. And the holieſt man that ever was upon Earth can no more *aſſign* and make over his *Righteouſneſs*, or *Repentance*, or any part of either, to another that wants it, than a man can *bequeath* his *Wiſdom*, or *Learning* to his *Heir*, or his *Friend*: No more than a *ſick man* can be reſtored to *Health* by virtue of the *Phyſick* which another man hath taken.

Let no man therefore think of being good by a *Deputy*, that cannot be contented to be happy and to be ſaved the ſame way, that is, to go to *Hell* and to be tormented there in *Perſon*, and to go to *Heaven* and be admitted into that *Place of Bliſs* only by *Proxy*. So that theſe *good Works* with a *hard name*, and the making over the *Merit* of them to others, have no manner of foundation either in *Scripture* or *Reaſon*, but are all mere *Fancy* and *Fiction* in *Divinity*.

The

The *Inference* from all this ſhall be the *application* which our *Saviour* makes of this *Parable*, *Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh*; as if he had ſaid, the deſign of this *Parable* is to inſtruct us that we ought to be continually vigilant, and always upon our guard and in a conſtant readineſs and preparation *to meet the Bridegroom*; becauſe we know not the time of his coming to *Judgment*, nor yet, which will be of the ſame conſequence and concernment to us, do any of us know the preciſe time of our own *Death*. Either of theſe may happen at any time, and come when we leaſt expect them. And therefore we ſhould make the beſt and ſpeedieſt proviſion that we can for another World, and ſhould be continually upon our watch and trimming our Lamps, that we may not be ſurprized by either of theſe; neither by our own *particular Death*, nor by the *general Judgment* of the World: *Becauſe the Son of man will come in a Day when we look not for Him, and at an hour when we are not aware.* v 13.

More particularly, we ſhould take up a preſent and effectual reſolution not to delay our *Repentance* and the reformation of our Lives, that we may not have that great Work to do when we are not fit to do any thing; no not to diſpoſe of our *temporal* Concernments, much leſs to prepare for *Eternity*, and to do that in a few moments which ought to have been the care and endeavour of our whole Lives: That we may not be forced to huddle up an imperfect, and I fear an inſignificant *Repentance*; and to do that in great haſte and confuſion, which certainly does require our wiſeſt and moſt deliberate thoughts, and all the conſideration in the world.

And we ſhould provide ſtore of *Oil* in our *Veſſels*, wherewith

wherewith to *ſupply* our *Lamps* that they may *burn bright* to the laſt; I mean, we ſhould improve the *Grace* which we received in *Baptiſm*, by abounding in the fruits of the Spirit and in all the ſubſtantial Virtues of a good Life; that ſo *an entrance may be miniſtred to us abundantly into the everlaſting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt.*

By this means, when we are called *to meet the Bridegroom*, we ſhall not be put to thoſe miſerable and ſharking ſhifts which the *fooliſh Virgins* were driven to, of *begging*, or *borrowing*, or *buying Oyl*; which will all fail us, when we come to depend upon them: And though the Dying man may make a hard ſhift to ſupport himſelf with theſe falſe Comforts for a little while, yet when the ſhort Deluſion is over, which will be aſſoon as ever he is ſtepp'd into the other World, he will to his everlaſting confuſion and trouble find the door of Heaven ſhut againſt him, and that notwithſtanding all his *vaſt Treaſure* of *Pardons* and *Indulgences*, which have coſt him ſo much and are worth ſo little, he *ſhall never ſee the Kingdom of God.*

And *laſtly*, we ſhould take great care that we do not extinguiſh our *Lamps* by *quitting* the *Profeſſion* of our *Holy Religion* upon any temptation of advantage, or for fear of any loſs or ſuffering whatſoever. This *Occaſion* will call for all our *Faith* and *Patience*, all our *Courage* and *Conſtancy*,

Nunc animis opus, Æneа, nunc pectore firmo.

When it comes to this *Trial*, we had need to *gird up the loins of our minds*, to ſummon all our forces, and to *put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to ſtand faſt in an evil day, and when we have done all to ſtand.*

And

And now, *my Brethren*, to uſe the words of *St. Peter*, *I teſtify unto you, that this is the true Grace of God wherein ye ſtand.* *The Proteſtant Reformed* Religion, which we in this Nation profeſs, is the *very Goſpel of Chriſt*, the *true ancient Chriſtianity.* 1 Pet 5. 12.

And, for God's ſake, ſince in this *hour of Temptation*, when our Religion is in ſo apparent hazard, we pretend to love it to that degree as to be contented to part with any thing for it, let us reſolve to practiſe it; and to teſtify our love to it in the ſame way that our *Saviour* would have us ſhew our love to Him, by *keeping his commandments.*

I will conclude all with the *Apoſtle*'s Exhortation, ſo very proper for this purpoſe, and to this preſent Time, *Only let your converſation be as it becometh the Goſpel of Chriſt*, that is, chiefly and above all take care to lead lives ſuitable to the *Chriſtian* Religion: And then, as it follows, *ſtand faſt in one Spirit, with one Mind, ſtriving together for the Faith of the Goſpel: And in nothing terrified by your Adverſaries, which to them is an evident token of perdition, but to you of Salvation, and that of God.* Philip. 1. 27.

Now unto Him that is able to ſtabliſh you in the Goſpel, and to keep you from falling; and to preſent you faultleſs before the preſence of his Glory with exceeding joy: To the only wiſe God our Saviour, be Glory and Majeſty, Dominion and Power, both *now and ever.* Amen.

FINIS.

Books Published by his Grace JOHN *Lord Archbishop of* Canterbury.

THirty Sermons and Discourses upon several Occasions, in Three Volumes. *Octavo.*

The Rule of Faith: Or, An Answer to the Treatise of Mr. *Sergeant, &c.* Octav.

A Discourse against Transubstantiation, *Octavo.* Alone. Price 3 *d.*

A Persuasive to frequent Communion in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. *Octavo* alone, price 3 *d.* In *Twelves bound*, price 6 *d.*

A Sermon preached at *Lincoln's-Inn* Chappel, on the 31 *st.* of *January*, 1688. being appointed for a Publick Thanksgiving to Almighty God for having made his Highness the Prince of *Orange* the Glorious Instrument of the Great Deliverance of this Kingdom from Popery and Arbitrary Power

A Sermon preached before the Queen at *Whitehall*, on *Matth.* 5. 44.

A Sermon preached before the King and Queen at *Hampton Court*, on *Luke* 10. 42.

A Sermon preached before the Queen, on *Matth.* 25. 46.

A Sermon preached before the House of Commons upon a Monthly Fast, on *Eccles.* 9. 11.

A Sermon preached before the Lord Mayor at *Bow-Church*, upon the Monthly Fast, on *Jer.* 6. 8.

A Sermon Preached before the Queen, on *Acts* 24 16.

A Sermon preached before the Queen at *Whitehall*, upon the Monthly Fast, *Septemb.* 16. 1691. on *Zech.* 7. 5.

A Sermon preached before the Queen at *Whitehall*, *March* 20. 1692. on *Psalm* 73. 25.

A Thanksgiving Sermon preached before the King and Queen at *Whitehall*, *Octob.* 27, 1692. on *Jer.* 9. 23, 24.

A Sermon preached before the King and Queen at *Whitehall*, *Feb.* 25th. 169$\frac{3}{4}$. Being the first *Sunday* in *Lent*. On *Titus* the 3*d.* and the 2*d.*

Sermons concerning the Divinity and Incarnation of our Blessed Saviour, *Octavo.*

18 JA 53

A Sermon preached before the Queen at *White-hall*, concerning the Sacrifice and Satisfaction of Christ, on *Heb.* 9. 26. Octavo.

A Sermon concerning the Unity of the Divine Nature and Trinity, on 1 *Tim.* 2. 5. Octavo.